

Zoology on the Table: Plenary Session 4

Following the third session of the forum we held a question and answer session facilitated by Mike Archer. The presentations covered by this plenary session were:

- The multiple faces of sustainability - from sustained yield harvest to triple bottom line (Sue Briggs)
- What's food and nutrition security got to do with wildlife conservation? (Robyn Alders)
- Semi-vegetarianism: good for animals, good for humans, good for the environment (Ian Wallis)
- Eating kangaroo (good) and goat (bad) for rangelands. (Gordon Grigg)

The following is a transcript of the plenary proceedings, lightly edited for readability.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7882/AZ.2017.024>

MIKE ARCHER (University of NSW – Plenary moderator): I have the same love of kangaroos having lived with them, having slept in bed with them, and I still like a good kangaroo steak. I think we can have our pets and eat them too. Okay. We have everybody ensconced. Now there must be a few burning questions after some of those provocative talks. I'm biting my tongue. Yes, at the front.

ROSIE COONEY (University of New South Wales): This is a response, Sue [Briggs], to your question how did we get from the sustainable harvest to sustainable development, but I think really Robyn answered your question, in a roundabout way, by saying from caring for animals you realise you have to end up caring for people. You know, it's people that actually cause the threat to ecosystems, and to address the threats you need to deal with all that messy, complicated people stuff, the governance, the rights, the gender issues, the health, food security, et cetera, because they all affect those conservation threats.

SUE BRIGGS (University of Canberra): I do partly agree with you. I was partly tongue-in-cheek, as you probably realise, to get a discussion going. But I guess what concerns me a bit is that - and I'm glad Gordon [Grigg] showed that book of sustainable use - I think we've lost our discussion around sustainable use - that's probably the crux of what I'm saying - because it's kind of been subsumed into sustainable development, which has a much broader and necessary goal. So that's probably where I'm coming from. Does anyone else want to comment?

LILIAN PEARCE (Australian National University): Following on from that - and thanks, Rosie, I think that was a great point - I wonder whether sustainable yield could be brought back into the conversation by focusing on distribution. Food wastage isn't something that we've really spoken about, other than wastage of protein in the culling sense. Would anyone like to comment on that?

SUE BRIGGS: I do agree with you. It's hard. Everyone will have a view on this of course, but I just think what bothers me about sustainable development, the way it's being treated through these big international UN-type things, is that we're not allowed to focus on some of those key small things can make a big difference. That's probably where I'm coming from. The ability to apply the levers is lost, and the waste thing, I think, is a classic example. So, yes, I kind of agree with that.

MIKE ARCHER: I have to say too, just thinking about that semi-vegetarianism stuff, that we had - in our discussion with a lot of people about these issues - Peter Ampt is now running the FATE project [Future of Australia's Terrestrial Ecosystems] in the University of Sydney, and what we found out fairly quickly, there's an awful lot of very, very smart vegetarians have opted for semi vegetarianism and they're calling themselves 'kangatarians', as they're quite happy to eat kangaroo meat.

K-LYNN SMITH (Macquarie University): My question is about the economics of things like trying to change from sheep to kangaroo. If the farmers can supplement their income, wouldn't they just continue to do the same number of sheep but actually take the money from kangaroos on top of it? I mean, if we consider ourselves rational, having extra money is always a good thing.

GORDON GRIGG (University of Queensland): Yes. The question assumes that land owners don't want to manage their land more sustainably. Lots of land owners do want to reduce their total grazing pressure, and if they could make enough money from kangaroos, particularly if the price did go up three to fivefold, there would be significant incentive to look to kangaroos as a resource. I've been told that by many of them, and many of them have told me, yes, they would carry fewer kangaroos. If they carry too many stock and a drought comes along, there's a huge impact on the land, which they can't do much about in the short term, often they can move them or whatever, but they have limited options.

So, if they carry fewer sheep anyway, kangaroos aren't as hard on the land. They carry fewer sheep; when the drought comes along they must be able to buffer it. That's the thinking and that's in-built into the idea.

MIKE ARCHER: Yes. One of the things that Peter Ampt was trying to do with the Barrier Ranges project in western New South Wales was to get a group of graduates to work together. One of the goals there too, one of the potential benefits, was the reduction in the need for so much infrastructure. If you didn't have as much fencing, because you're going to share a resource equitably across a whole range of properties, there were some potential benefits in that area as well.

K-LYNN SMITH: Just one thing about the tragedy of the commons, if you have many trying to share a resource - and it is clear that they are economically incentivised because, as you said, they switch to goats, which are actually worse and much harder on the environment than, I think even sheep, because of their hard hooves and such, and rather than just grazing flats, they take the entire environment.

MIKE ARCHER: This is the kangaroo therapy that Gordon was talking about essentially.

K-LYNN SMITH: Right, but instead they followed the rational and went with goats.

MIKE ARCHER: Yes.

ROBYN ALDERS (University of Sydney): Just to touch on two of those points. Basically, when you see goats out there it tells you that nothing else can make it. Goats are not a good sign, and they're much maligned. When you see goats, they're very amazing animals and they browse across a whole range. They don't just need grass. They'll browse all the way up. An increase in goats tells you you've got a problem. One of the things that strikes me about coming back to Australia is we're 85 per cent urban. How many people in this room actually produced some or all of the food that they ate today? Please put up your hand if you've produced some of your food? Okay. [less than 10 hands went up in the audience]

MIKE ARCHER: Does coffee count? I made it.

ROBYN ALDERS: So, you produce some of your food. How do you feel about farmers? I don't understand our really negative attitude to farmers, and we do lump them all. There is diversity amongst farmers. There are farmers, particularly family farmers, who do have those ties to land, who are really trying to turn it around, but urban Australians, consumers, need to support that and to be involved, and so none of us would be here, living in cities, without them.

MIKE ARCHER: On the other hand, we do have to remember that goats are the possible cause of the Sahara Desert.

TANYA STEPHENS: Great talks, really interesting, and I'm all in favour of eating kangaroos, and even goats free range, and I'm interested in semi vegetarianism. I think that's great, but I'm thinking about Africa as well with Robyn's talk and in tying it in together. We have people in central Africa who eat bushmeat, and they eat as much meat as we do, and they don't have a vegetarian option because they are pushed into areas where they can't grow crops anyway, and bushmeat is unsustainable.

I'm interested in your take on this very large area of the world where they don't have the kangaroo equivalent and there's a lot of wastage. So they've got, you know, other things like elephants, but it's not sustainable to eat elephants. How we can overcome that problem, and Robyn's take in particular on using poultry in those areas.

MIKE ARCHER: Thank you for that, and before we pass it to the panel, can I pass that to Rosie, because it's an area that Rosie Cooney has been working in intimately.

ROSIE COONEY: Well, I think I'd say that we can't necessarily say bushmeat must be unsustainable. You know, a lot of the species harvested are very common species. They're not threatened. They're things like duikers that reproduce readily and are very resilient to harvest. But there's no incentive for people to be selective about harvest in general; because of the tragedy of the commons, if they don't get it somebody else will. But there are some small scale experiments. For instance, in Ghana, giving people strong, secure community level property rights over land, and in that case, they do have a real incentive to look after it, and they do and they keep other people out and they regulate harvest levels, and there's been real wildlife recoveries in those areas.

So I would say, yes, alternatives are good where they're going to work, where people want to raise livestock. A lot of people don't see themselves as livestock rearers. But, you know, we also should be trying to make sustainable management work.

ROBYN ALDERS: In places where you have perceived unsustainable harvesting it's usually linked to cities. The communities themselves and what they need, they can satisfy that where you have healthy ecosystems. Your problem is having people moving to cities sometimes having a preference for certain types of bushmeat, and also people's concern about the way domestic animals are produced, so thinking that either a village chicken or wildlife is going to be healthier, less antibiotics. So there is a whole heap of reasons there where we're not addressing what it

is our food systems are delivering and what it is that people look for, and it's crucial that we do that as we become increasingly urban.

MIKE ARCHER: Thank you, Robyn. Is everybody going to let Ian get off? We need somebody to put him under the spotlight, I think.

FIONA PROBYN-RAPSEY (University of Sydney): Ian, thanks for your paper. Can you tell us more about how you see sustainability being a good way of arguing for semi vegetarianism? I'm just interested to understand how you came to see sustainability as a way of arguing for semi-vegetarianism as opposed to, say, animal ethics, animal rights, animal welfare.

IAN WALLIS (Australian National University): These things are all linked. I think you can almost forget about animal welfare. Just let it go, because the minute you go towards being a semi-vegetarian, as I say, you're going to farm less land because you're not going to be putting all this food - feeding it to animals, and, by definition, you're going to be farming fewer animals and therefore that's good for animals. And, look, I'm really thinking about the western world, because this is where we're seeing this. I can't really comment on the bushmeat scenario of the last question. It's the western world that's really turning into this feedlot industrial agriculture where we're growing a crop and feeding it to an animal and sending it out of a McDonald's or a greasy chicken in a southern USA outlet type thing.

And keep in mind that right now we're starting to turn in Australia to putting beef animals in feedlots and feeding them again on inappropriate things, and there's no bigger waste and drain than feeding it to cattle. Cattle are grazing animals. They should be eating cellulose.

MIKE ARCHER: Of course, there is an issue about the fact that, in Australia at least, where Gordon [Grigg] is talking about, there is sustainable wild harvest on rangelands and there's nothing else you can do with that in terms of producing foods that humans could use.

IAN WALLIS: Absolutely. That's what I'm saying. Yes.

ROBYN ALDERS: Just about understanding and thinking about our own nutrition. The modern broiler does not provide the same range of nutrients as the traditional, older varieties of birds. There are publications in public health and nutrition showing that the nutritional profile is actually worse of the modern broiler. So we need to think about things before we eat.

SUE BRIGGS: I agree with Ian about semi-vegetarianism, and I guess I sort of am now, but there's a problem. The obesity crisis, I think there's no doubt, is due to processed

carbohydrates; it's not due to too much fat, by and large; and people eating too much, it is partly due to that. But if you eat enough grain to get enough protein, I think a lot of people, and I know myself, would put on weight. So I think there is an issue to be dealt with: eating enough grain to get enough protein.

MIKE ARCHER: Ian?

IAN WALLIS: Did I ever suggest that we eat more grain at any point? What I'm saying, take those soy beans, high in protein, and eat those things. Give the chicken diet to the human and not to the chicken. Feed the soy beans to the human.

MIKE ARCHER: Okay. Last question. Is there anybody else up the back who hasn't had a chance?

MICHELLE YOUNG (Australian National University): A question to Robyn. When I was doing my research, I interviewed Kerin O'Dea and she was telling me about how, when she went onto country with Aboriginal people and they were using traditional foods, when they caught kangaroos they ate the whole kangaroo, the eyeballs, the tongue, every bit of it, the brain, and they relished it, and you made mention of the fact that, you know, just eating the muscle isn't the best thing to do. I wonder if you have any comments about how you could see any pathways towards mainstream society eating from tip to toe, you know, moving back towards that.

ROBYN ALDERS: I guess every second word is "mindfulness" these days, but it is about mindful eating. It's understanding what you need and how you can obtain that most efficiently, basically. I think we need to get over it. The objection that many Australians have about eating offal, the liver, that sort of thing, I think, is that we're all tied up with our own mortality. We just need to address some of those issues. But it is crucially important, and in terms of other societies looking at us - the great thing about being a white person in Africa is that there's nothing we can do or say that will surprise people. They've seen crazy white people going through the whole - you know, for centuries. The fact that we kill an animal and eat the least valuable part, to them, is not a surprise.

MIKE ARCHER: I have to say, having examined the archaeological remains from Puntutjarpa rock shelter in central Western Australia, what amazed me was that there was no fragment of the kangaroos that hadn't been busted open, including even the teeth. They are picking organic materials out from within the actual molars themselves. So, I second what you say. We don't treat kangaroos with respect. That's the problem.

I think we want to thank everybody for this afternoon's talks.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Robyn Alders.
Photo by Dan Lunney.



Peter Banks FRZS chairing
the fourth session, with
Peggy Eby FRZS.
Photo by Dan Lunney.



Ilan Wallis.
Photo by Dan Lunney.



Gordon Grigg FRZS.
Photo by Dan Lunney.



Mike Archer FRZS facilitating the fourth plenary.
Photo by Dan Lunney.



Mike Archer facilitating the discussion with the panel (L-R): Gordon Grigg, Sue Briggs, Robyn Alders and Ian Wallis.
Photo by Dan Lunney.



Ian Wallis and Fiona Probyn-Rapsey.
Photo by Martin Predavec.



The audience in the fourth plenary.

Photo by Martin Predavec.